

Agency: Department of Natural Resources**Project Title:**

Juneau Area Historic Tour Development

State Funding Requested: \$ 250,000
One-Time Need**House District: Juneau Areawide (3-4)****Brief Project Description:**

This project will provide funding to develop two major Alaska historic sites and open them to the public for use by cruise ship visitors and tour groups, community groups, schools, and individuals. This project would enable visitors to gain understanding and appreciation for two famous Alaskan champions of statehood who were leaders in territorial and state government.

Funding Plan:**Total Cost of Project: \$250,000**Funding Secured*Amount FY*Other Pending Requests*Amount FY*Anticipated Future Need*Amount FY*

There is no other funding needed

Detailed Project Description and Justification:

This project will provide funding to develop two major Alaska historic sites to be open to the public for use by cruise ship visitors and tour groups, community groups, schools, and individuals. Public access to the Judge James Wickersham House and the Ernest Gruening Cabin are currently not possible due to lack of funding. This project would enable visitors to gain understanding and appreciation for two famous Alaskans who were leaders in territorial and state government.

Funding will enhance tourism opportunities for cruise ship passengers and other tour groups, and implement the Historic Interpretive Plan that is currently under development. Funding would also enable these sites to be used during 2008 & 2009 statehood celebrations, and enable Division of State Parks to seek "Save American Treasures" and other funds for displays, interpretation, and facility improvements.

Project Timeline:

Funding will be expended in FY09.

Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:

DNR Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Grant Recipient Contact Information:

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Total Project Snapshot Report

FY 2009 Capital Budget

TPS Report 49487

Has this project been through a public review process at the local level and is it a community priority? ☒ Yes ☐ No

Juneau Area Historic Tour Development and Management Funding Request – 250k

\$250,000 requested for FY 2009 will allow both the Judge James Wickersham House and the Ernest Gruening Cabin, two major Alaska historic sites in the Juneau area under management of State Parks and Outdoor Recreation, to be open to the public for use by cruise ship visitors and tour groups, school children, community groups and all citizens of Alaska, to gain understanding and appreciation of two famous Alaskan champions of statehood who were leaders in territorial and state government, and in national affairs.

Rationale and Detail

Cruise ships are bringing more families and younger adults to Alaska, increasing the demand for diversity in on-shore experiences. Two historic sites in Juneau already designated as state park facilities can be opened for tour visits with modest expenditure for operations that may generate revenue to cover a substantial portion of operating costs. With statehood celebrations beginning in 2008, fifty years after the US Congress voted to make Alaska the 49th state, State Parks Division can contribute by opening the homes, photos, collections and writings of two champions of Alaska statehood. The sites can be available in summer to cruise ship visitors, and can be available year round on an appointment or scheduled basis to the citizens of Alaska and the many independent and business visitors to Alaska. Operating the two facilities will take advantage of past and future volunteer contributions, and may provide several summer jobs and training in historical guiding techniques. Operational funding will leverage additional grant resources for special projects for documentaries and additional displays.

Wickersham House Tours:

To take advantage of recent reconstruction and put the Wickersham House into operation as an active State Historic Park, the Juneau Area Advisory Board requests funding of a one-year temporary museum curator-qualified staff person or historic sites planner in SFY09. This is an opportunity that should not be missed, for re-opening the House to the public, and for enabling the Division of Parks to pursue new federal and private foundation funding such as “Save American Treasures” grants, to enhance future development of this Alaska treasure.

The rich collection of historic items has been inventoried but remains in storage until funding is available for operations. One goal for first year operations is to market historic tours to the House for small groups. Work to be done to open the doors to tour groups and the general public includes:

- preparing displays,
- contracting for videos and for audio material for historical interpretation, and
- establishing a fee schedule for users and for sales (videos, books, booklets, slides, etc.), to contribute to ongoing operational support.

In 1984 the state purchased and established The House of Wickersham State Historic Site. The Wickersham Report, dated 3/82, recommended interpretation of the life, collection, library and home of the Honorable James Wickersham. Judge Wickersham lived in Juneau in the 1930s after retiring from representing territorial Alaska in Congress. He had been appointed to the new Third Judicial Court by President McKinley in 1900, served as a judge and representative for more than thirty years. In 1916, he introduced the first Alaska Statehood Bill. He compiled the first edition of the Alaska Reports, a record of all decisions of the Alaska courts, and, after retiring from Congress at age 76, he assembled the first index of all material published about Alaska, the Wickersham Bibliography. Wickersham died in Juneau on October 23, 1939, the year Ernest Gruening was appointed Governor by President Roosevelt. (See <http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/units/wickrshm.htm> for more background.)

A primary purpose for the purchase of the house and collection was to house and interpret the Judge's vast collection of Alaskan memorabilia, covering 1900 through the 1930s, making it available to the public. The home and collection were placed under the management of the Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. Since the purchase of the home and collection, appropriations and grants have been expended on the structure for stabilization and repair. During SFY08 a large (200k) grant is being expended on the structure for renovation and repair. However, over the past 24 years little to no funding has ever been allocated for the purpose of interpretation and operation of the facility as a house museum. Operating funds are needed now to staff the House and to do the ongoing work of preparing and maintaining displays, welcoming the public, scheduling/booking tours and groups, maintaining visitor records and managing funds received, and reporting to the Area Park Superintendent on progress and needs.

Street parking is very limited in front of the Wickersham House. A van/handicapped parking space and ramp are available in front but further provision for parking is needed to provide space for visitors to the house. Capital funding is requested for this parking area expansion and surfacing.

Gruening Cabin State Historic Park Tours:

2009, the 50th anniversary year of Alaska statehood, should be the ideal time to tell the story of Alaska Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening, often called the "father of Alaska statehood." Governor (then Senator) Gruening's rustic summer home near Dotson's Landing/Amalga Harbor (24 miles north of downtown Juneau) provides a beautiful setting for showing off Alaska's political and natural history. The Juneau Area State Parks Advisory Committee and a non-profit community group, Friends of Ernest Gruening State Historic Park, have drafted a plan for a handicapped accessible trail, cabin renovation and protection, and parking improvements, to make the site usable for tour groups, schools and the general public. Site improvements (at minimum, reinforcing the cabin foundation, gravel for parking and existing trail and construction of the trail spur from the existing trail to the parking area) are needed to make the Cabin and 13-acre site

more amenable for tour groups to visit. Even in its current rustic condition, guides can lead visitors on tours of the site, but photos, audio and video clips, interpretive materials and displays, and training materials for guides, are essential to help visitors see the evidence of the past, and hear the stories of the people and events that shaped Alaska, and are connected to this place.

In 1989 (thirty years after statehood), the state purchased the cabin and site where Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening wrote the manifesto for statehood called “The State of Alaska” in 1953. Governor and then Senator Gruening and his family entertained national and foreign leaders at the cabin, including Adlai Stevenson, Governor Earl Warren, numerous U.S. Senators, and others. Many famous and not-so-famous Alaskans also enjoyed political talk, bird watching, spectacular views across Lynn Canal, and fishing and swimming in the cove and in the Peterson Creek “Salt Chuck.”

The legislature established the area in 1989 as Ernest Gruening State Historic Site. The purpose was for the preservation and interpretation of the summer home of Alaska’s former governor and senator. The associated structure and property were placed under the management of the Department of Natural Resource Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. Since that time a minimal amount of funding has been available for the upkeep and maintenance of the structure but no funding has been set aside for development and interpretation. The physical structure is in a state of decay and the Division of Parks has had only minimal staff time to dedicate to the site due to staffing cuts over the past 15 years.

The Friends of Ernest Gruening State Historic Park plan to apply for Alaska Statehood Experience grant funds (Alaska Humanities Forum and the Rasmussen Foundation) for up to \$10,000 for a video/oral history/display project that would produce material ready for use with tour groups. The City Museum and State Historic Library as well as UAF Gruening Papers collection contain vast resource materials and expertise to support development of materials for display and presentation. A State Historic Parks Planner/Interpretive Specialist is needed to work with the area Advisory Board, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and State Parks planning staff on developing and implementing the historic interpretation plan for the Site, with the goal of beginning tours of school groups as early as January 2009, and having staff and materials for summer tourism season of 2009, the 50-year celebration of statehood. Marketing for the site tours needs to begin in the fall of 2008 with representatives of the tourism industry.

The Juneau Area State Parks Advisory Board sees this as a unique opportunity to enrich the experience of cruise ship and independent tourists to the Juneau area and to Alaska. Historical tours can add a whole new dimension to visitors’ experiences. Visiting the Gruening Cabin and the Salt Chuck with its reversible falls at highest tides can provide an alternative to outdoor activities or flight seeing when weather makes these impossible, or can be an additional component of a trip that may include kayaking near the Salt Chuck, or hiking up Herbert Glacier trail. Community investment, volunteer time donations, solicitation of additional grant funds, and collaboration with state and local

experts converge to make this an exciting project that can have lasting benefit for the state, the community and for the tourism industry and clients.

Summary:

Funding for the Wickersham House and Gruening Cabin historic tours project would accomplish the following enhancements to tourism and public use of state historic park facilities and collections:

- Implement the Historic Interpretive Plan for the Wickersham House (being planned under contract with grant and state funds during FY08)
- Plan, develop and implement an historic interpretation program for cruise ship passenger tours and school-based tours to the Ernest Gruening Cabin at the Ernest Gruening State Historical Park
- Enable the historic homes of two heroes of Alaska statehood to be well utilized during statehood celebrations in 2009, as well as into the future
- Improve street signs and parking at the historic sites
- Enable the Division of State Parks to seek “Save American Treasures” and other outside funds for displays, interpretation and facility improvements, and
- Allow for the staff time to organize and oversee volunteer activities for research, collections development, display preparation, videographic work, and audio narrative oral history material for display and use (for the historic sites and potentially for use during transport to the historic sites via tour bus, taxi, etc.)
- Establish fee schedules for facility use.

Budget in Brief for Historic Tours Development and Management Project, Wickersham and Gruening State Historic Sites:

Historic Site Interpretive Plan Development	70	Temporary/1-year Historic Site Manager position and 2-3 seasonal employees/guides for historic sites
Wickersham House Parking Lot Improvements	50	Parking improvements to better accommodate cruise ship passengers
Gruening Cabin Assessment	50	Structural and historical review and report on Gruening cabin DNR History/Archaeology
Gruening State Park Parking & Trail Improvements	20	Parking and trail improvements to better accommodate cruise ship passenger tours
Interpretive Educational Materials Development	30	Development and printing of brochures, maps, and interpretive displays
Historic Tour Marketing	30	Marketing plan contract including prep of marketing schedule for tourism and schools, and revenue and expense forecast
Total Request	250	